

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

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R 081214Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9390

INFO COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

S E C R E T BANGKOK 16509

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH, LA

SUBJECT: ARREST OF THAI ASSISTANT MILITARY ATTACHES

REF: A) VIENTIANE 5146

B) USDAO VIENTIANE 071125Z AUG 75

C) VIENTIANE 5157

1. SUMMARY. THE THAI ARE PULLING OUT VARIOUS STOPS TO COMMUNICATE THEIR ANGER TO THE PGNU OVER THE ARREST AUGUST 5 OF TWO DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL IN VIENTIANE. DESPITE AN ULTIMATUM WHICH HAS EXPIRED, THERE IS NO SIGN OF MOVEMENT ON THE LAO SIDE. THE THAI HAVE ANNOUNCED THE EXPULSION OF TWO LAO DIPLOMATS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE RTG IS INCENSED OVER THE ARREST OF ITS TWO ASSISTANT MILITARY ATTACHES THREE DAYS AGO IN LAOS. (A THIRD THAI, A MECHNIC WHO WAS VISITING THE ATTACHES AT THE TIME, IS ALSO BEING HELD.) IN THE ABSENCE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTER, MFA UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE PHAEN WANNAMETHI CONVOKED LAO AMBASSADOR OUAN SNITH AUGUST 6 TO REQUEST THEIR RELEASE AND AN EXPLANATION FOR THE ACTION, INFORMING HIM THAT THE RTG MAY FIND
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IT NECESSARY TO TAKE MEASURES TO PROTECT THE SAFETY OF

THE MEMBERS OF ITS DIPLOMATIC STAFF IN LAOS. PHAEN CONVOKED HIM AGAIN AUGUST 7 AT WHICH TIME HE DELIVERED A STRONG ULTIMATUM TO THE EFFECT THAT THE PGNU HAD BETTER REPLY POSITIVELY ON RELEASE OF THE TWO ATTACHES BY MID-NIGHT AUGUST 7 OR FACE POSSIBLE UNNAMED REPRISALS.

3. AT THE SAME TIME, PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT ISSUED A STRONG STATEMENT DENOUNCING THE LAO ACTION AS A VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND ESTABLISHED DIPLOMATIC PRACTICE, AND AS AN INSULT TO THAI NATIONAL HONOR. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT THAILAND DOES NOT WANT THE INCIDENT TO AFFECT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

4. THEP THAWAKUN, MFA CHIEF OF THE SOUTH EAST ASIA DIVISION, TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER AUGUST 8 THAT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF MOVEMENT ON THE LAO SIDE. THAI AMBASSADOR TO LAOS SAWET KOMANLAPHUTI CALLED AUGUST 7 ON ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUNE SIPRASEUTH. PHOUNE EXPLAINED THAT THE POLICE DID NOT KNOW THE ATTACHES HAD DIPLOMATIC STATUS, WHICH THE THAI FOUND VERY STRANGE SINCE THE TWO HAVE BEEN ACCREDITED AND RESIDENT IN VIENTIANE FOR TWO YEARS AND WERE ARRESTED IN THEIR HOUSE WHICH IS INCLUDED IN THE DIPLOMATIC LIST. ACCORDING TO THEP, PHOUNE REPLIED THAT HE WAS SURPRISED THEY HAD DIPLOMATIC STATUS AND SAID THE PGNU WILL HAVE TO ESTABLISH THE FACTS IN THE CASE BEFORE THE THAI CAN BE RELEASED.

5. IN LATE MORNING AUGUST 8, UNDER-SECRETARY PHAEN CONVOKED THE LAO AMBASSADOR HERE ONCE AGAIN, THIS TIME TO INFORM HIM THAT THE RTG HAS DECLARED TWO MEMBERS OF HIS STAFF, COUNSELLOR KHAMTHONG BOULOM AND THIRD SECRETARY NOUDAENG NAKHAVANIT, PERSONA NON GRATA. THEY HAVE BEEN ORDERED TO LEAVE THAILAND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THIS ACTION, ACCORDING TO THE PRESS THE MOST SERIOUS THAILAND HAS EVER TAKEN WITH A FOREIGN COUNTRY, OCCURRED IN VIEW OF THE UGNU'S NONRESPONSIVENESS TO THAILAND'S ULTIMATUM.

6. THE DATT DISCOVERED THAT THE THAI MILITARY ALSO
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VIEWS THIS INCIDENT SERIOUSLY. COUPLED WITH AN EARLIER LAO WOUNDING OF A THAI SAILOR ALONG THE MEKONG AND A FEW EXCHANGES OF SHOTS OVER PASSAGE BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE BORDER, THE THAI MILITARY ARE INSISTING THEIR GOVERNMENT TAKE A HARD STAND.

7. THE DATT, FROM AN UNIMPEACHABLE SOURCE, HAS OBTAINED THE INFORMATION THAT THE MFA HAS AUTHORIZED

ITS AMBASSADOR TO LAOS TO RETURN TO THAILAND FOR CONSULTATIONS AT HIS DISCRETION. IN ADDITION, ALL MEMBERS OF THE THAI DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN VIENTIANE HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED TO BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL AND CIRCUMSPECT SO AS NOT TO PROVIDE THE LAO WITH A SHADOW OF SUSPICION WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO A WORSENING OF THE SITUATION.

8. FROM WHAT WE HEAR, THE THAI ARE PARTICULARLY ANGRY AT THE LAO BECAUSE THE OFFICERS WERE ARRESTED IN THEIR SKIVVIES AND WERE NOT PERMITTED TO DRESS BEFORE THEIR IMPRISONMENT. THIS PERSONAL HUMILIATION ALMOST OVERSHADOWS THE DIPLOMATIC INDIGNITY THE THAI OFFICERS SUFFERED IN BEING TAKEN OFF TO JAIL.

9. COMMENT: THAILAND'S EXPULSION OF THE TWO DIPLOMATS EVENS THE SCORE WITH LAOS AND ENABLES IT TO PRESERVE ITS DIGNITY AFTER THE LAO IGNORED ITS ULTIMATUM. TEMPERMIGHT COOL NOW THAT EACH SIDE HAS HAD ITS TURN AT THE OTHER. CONVERSELY, THIS LATEST MOVE COULD MERELY SERVE TO EXACERBATE ILL FEELINGS AND LEAD TO A MUTUAL RECALL OF AMBASSADORS FOR CONSULTATIONS. THE BALL IS NOW IN THE LAO COURT AND THE NEXT MOVE IS UP TO THEM. HOWEVER THEIR CURRENT FRACAS COMES OUT, THE TWO PARTIES CAN BE EXPECTED TO REGARD EACH OTHER WITH INCREASING WARINESS. WHITEHOUSE

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